

Chiswell House..
Williamsburg
James City County
Virginia

HABS No/ VA-404

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared in Washington Office

CHISWELL HOUSE
Williamsburg, James City County, Virginia

Owner: Williamsburg Restoration (formerly, Colonel Freeman)

Date of erection: Early eighteenth century

Builder: Colonel Charles Chiswell

Present condition: Fair; now under restoration

Description:

The Chiswell house is perhaps one of the most unusual in Williamsburg, having a unique plan and interior finish. In elevation it is four bays long with a high gable roof. The chimney is approximately in the center of the building. The door is in the left, or east, bay of the front and is of considerable interest. It is mid-Georgian in style and has six panels, the two horizontal panels being in the center, the vertical above and below. The mouldings are notable for their great depth and richness. This door originally hung at the entrance of the Griffin house, on West Francis Street near Boundry. The sash and siding of the Chiswell house are all modern, and there is a recent porch.

The plan is of four rooms arranged in a block with a chimney in the center. It should be noted that this corresponds to the original plan of Scotchtown, Hanover County, Virginia (HABS No. 117), also built by Chiswell, and the Peachy-Randolph house in Williamsburg.

The entrance hall occupies the northeast corner of the building, and the stair ascends westward against the south wall. The inside walls are covered with sheathing in wide boards alternately advanced and recessed about one-half inch. The advance boards are beaded on their edges; the others are plain. This gives, in a sense, the effect of long panels. The stair is of the closed-string type with a plain beaded string piece below an elaborately moulded cap. This is in the form of a moulded cove. The balusters are classic in form and are exceptionally heavy, being 2 1/4 inches across. Their truncated form gives them an early character. The handrail is heavy, with a moulded cap. It is not ramped but is eased over the top of the posts and newel at the beginning of the run and is received against them at the top of the run.

The northwest room is fully paneled, but the rails and styles are unmoulded and the panels flat. This type was formerly

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duplicated in the Casey house, near the corner of North Henry and Duke of Gloucester Streets, now destroyed. This latter had an interesting stone mantel, somewhat similar to those in the east dependency of Mount Airy, Richmond County, Virginia. The marble mantel formerly in the Chiswell house, with the grey and white marble hearth, is now installed in the Middle Room of the Richard Bland house. It is of dark green Purbeck marble with fluted pilaster strip and a key in the frieze. The rest of the house has been much modernized.

Author:

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